

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 2255

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, EC
SUBJECT: GALO PLAZA CITES PROBABLE DELAY IN TRANSITION TO
CIVILIAN RULE

1. SUMMARY: GALO PLAZA IN HIS CAPACITY AS PRESIDENT OF SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL ANNOUNCED TO PRESS ON MARCH 4 THAT PACE OF RECEDULATION MIGHT NOT ALLOW A CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM TO BE HELD UNTIL APRIL 1978. MEDIA PROJECTED THAT IF SUCH IS THE CASE, TRANSFER OF AUTHORITY TO A CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT COULD NOT TAKE PLACE UNTIL LATE SUMMER 1978. POLITICAL PARTY REACTION RANGED FROM SHOCK TO ANGER TO DEMANDS THAT MILITARY STEPDOWN IMMEDIATELY AND HAND POWER OVER TO PROVISIONAL CIVILIAN PRESIDENT. WHILE PLAZA'S PROJECTIONS SEEM OVERLY PESSIMISTIC TO US, THE GOE DOES NOT PLAN TO COMMENT OFFICIALLY UNTIL APRIL 11.

2. SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL PRESIDENT AND EX-PRESIDENT OF ECUADOR, GALO PLAZA, IN DECLARATIONS REPORTED IN THE PRESS APRIL 5, STATED THAT IT WILL PROBABLY BE TECHNICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO FULFILL THE GOE'S ORIGINAL SCHEDULE OF TURNING OVER POWER TO A CIVILIAN REGIME BY EARLY 1978. PLAZA COMMENTED THAT HE HAD JUST RECEIVED A REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF CIVIL REGISTRY THAT THE ISSUANCE OF NEW
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IDENTIFICATION CARDS TO ALL ECUADOREANS (A STEP THE GOE CLAIMS IS NECESSARY) AT THE PRESENT PACE, CANNOT BE COMPLETED BEFORE NOVEMBER 1977. GIVEN THAT DATE, AND THE TIME REQUIRED TO PREPARE VOTING LISTS, PLAZA CONCLUDED THAT THE REFERENDUM TO CHOOSE A NEW CONSTITUTION UNDER PRESENT PROVISIONS COULD NOT BE HELD BEFORE APRIL 1978 (LEADING TO PRESS SPECULATION THAT A PRESIDENTIAL

ELECTION COULD NOT BE HELD BEFORE JUNE, AND THE INAUGURATION BEFORE AUGUST 1978). PLAZA SAID THAT ALL EFFORTS WERE BEING MADE TO COMPLETE THE TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE BUT ADDED THAT TIME WILL BE TAKEN TO ADMINISTER THE PROCESS PROPERLY. PLAZA ALSO DENIED THAT THERE WAS ANY SUBSTANCE TO THE RUMOR THAT HE WOULD BE NAMED PROVISIONAL PRESIDENT BY THE JUNTA.

3. PLAZA'S STATEMENT HAS PROVOKED SURPRISE AND SKEPTICISM ON THE PART OF THE PRESS AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES. THOSE PARTIES THAT HAVE OPPOSED THE GOE'S PLAN TO RESTORE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT SINCE ITS INCEPTION HAVE ADOPTED AN "I TOLD YOU SO" ATTITUDE AND HAVE CALLED FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF AN INTERIM CIVILIAN PRESIDENT. PLAZA'S OWN LIBERAL PARTY CALLED INTO QUESTION THE GOOD FAITH OF THE GOE AND DEMANDED AN IMMEDIATE TRANSFER OF POWER TO A PROVISIONAL CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY FEARED THAT THE PREDICTED DELAY WOULD LEAD TO PUBLIC ORDER PROBLEMS. ASAAD BUCARAM, HOWEVER, REITERATED HIS CONFIDENCE IN THE PROMISES OF THE GOE.

4. COMMENT: IN THE FACE OF GENERAL SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE SCHEDULE, THE GOE HAS STEADFASTLY MAINTAINED THAT THE CEDULATION PROCESS WAS CONTINUING ON SCHEDULE, THAT IT WOULD BE COMPLETED IN AUGUST OR SEPTEMBER, AND THAT ALL STEPS WOULD BE COMPLETE FOR A TRANSFER OF POWER BY FEBRUARY, 1978. AS THE EMBASSY HAS REPORTED, IN THE PAST TWO MONTHS THERE HAS BEEN A GROWING ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOE'S GOOD FAITH IN THE QUESTION OF TRANSFER OF POWER AND CONFIDENTIAL

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GREATER BELIEF THAT THE TRANSITION WILL ACTUALLY TAKE PLACE. PLAZA'S ANNOUNCEMENT, AND THE GOE'S LACK OF RESPONSE, HAVE GIVEN A SIGNIFICANT BLOW TO THE GROWING PUBLIC SUPPORT AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE ANNOUNCED PLAN FOR A RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT AND HAVE REVIVED THE EARLIER STRONG SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE GOE'S REAL INTENTIONS.

5. ALTHOUGH PLAZA WAS SPEAKING IN HIS AUTONOMOUS CAPACITY AS PRESIDENT OF THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL, AND NOT AS AN OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN FOR THE GOE, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT HE IS COLLABORATING WITH THE JUNTA IN BEING THE BEARER OF UNPLEASANT NEWS FOR WHAT PURPOSES WE CAN ONLY SPECULATE. WHATEVER THE REASON, PLAZA'S PROJECTIONS SEEM EXAGGERATED IN THEIR PESSIMISM TO US AND APPEAR TO INCLUDE AT LEAST 3-4 MONTHS OF SLACK.

6. PLAZA'S DENIAL OF RUMORS ABOUT THE MILITARY HANDING OVER POWER TO HIM PROVISIONALLY WAS STIMULATED BY THE

APPRAISAL OF MANY POLITICIANS THAT THE MILITARY, LOATH TO
SEE THE ELECTING AS PRESIDENT OF POPULIST ASAAD BUCARAM
(QUITO A-19) AND PRESSURED TO GIVE UP POWER, MIGHT OPT
TO HAND OVER POWER TO A CIVILIAN LIKE PLAZA AS PART OF
THE TRANSITION PROCESS. THE POSSIBLE PROLONGATION OF
MILITARY RULE CITED BY PLAZA WILL PROBABLY HARDEN THE
POSITIONS OF THOSE DOUBTING THE BONA FIDES OF THE TRANSI-
TION PROCESS AND MAY INCREASE THE DEMANDS THAT THE
MILITARY STEP ASIDE BEFORE THE PROCESS IS COMPLETED AND
CHOOSE A PROVISIONAL CIVILIAN PRESIDENT. A RELIABLE
EMBASSY SOURCE WHO WAS WITH PLAZA LAST WEEK, REPORTED
THAT PLAZA HAD ACKNOWLEDGED THE RUMORS BUT THAT HIS
DENIALS IN PRIVATE SEEMED TOUCHED WITH FALSE MODESTY AND
WERE "UNCONVINCING."
BLOOMFIELD

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